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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000497

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [RU](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: CZECH PRESIDENT: PUTIN SERIOUS ABOUT MISSILE
DEFENSE CONCERNS

REF: PRAGUE 486

Classified By: Ambassador Richard W Graber for reasons 1.4 b+d

11. (C) Czech President Vaclav Klaus asked to see Ambassador on May 7 to brief on his April 26-29 state visit to Moscow, and specifically his discussions with President Putin on missile defense (MD). Klaus said he found Putin to be more strident than he had expected on the issue, adding that he "thinks Putin really believes" what the Russians are saying, i.e., that the proposed U.S. MD assets in Central Europe are actually targeted at Russia (reftel and previous). In other words, Klaus does not believe that the Russian saber-rattling on MD is mainly for domestic consumption. Klaus's assessment is based in part on the difference in tone he noted in the Russian leader's private comments on MD and what he heard in Moscow during the debate over NATO enlargement, when the GOR's public rhetoric was shrill, but the enlargement question was rarely raised in private meetings.

12. (C) Klaus reported that he used his meeting with Putin to try to convince him that the proposed system was designed to meet at threat from the Middle East, but that he quickly saw it was futile to try to change Putin's mind. Asked what he thought the GOR wants to see result from its counter-offensive on MD, Klaus said he had no idea whether the goal was simply to see the MD proposal move off the table or some broader strategic Russian objective. In terms of next steps, Klaus recommended that the U.S. and Russia "keep talking."

13. (C) Klaus otherwise described the visit to Moscow and his talks with the Russian leadership as cordial and productive. He described Putin as more relaxed and confident than he had observed in the past. Klaus speculated that Putin may recognize that "the end is in sight" and feel emboldened as a result. He noted that Putin was leaving for a spring ski trip shortly after their meeting.
GRABER